

The Historic Route in Ethiopian Tourism Development

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Abstract

The historic route is an area in Ethiopia that mainly covers the northern part. Because of its' advantage being the center of an ancient civilization, the area is endowed with huge historical and archeological monuments. The area is also home of four world heritage sites, including the only natural world heritage site of the country, the Simien Mountains National Park. When one thinks about tourism in Ethiopia, it is hard to forget the historic route. This article is a review of different tourism development plans which focus on how much the historic route influences tourism plans in Ethiopia and it also shows how much the area is essential to Ethiopian tourism development in general. The study shows a close relationship between tourism development plans in Ethiopia and the historic route. It is very rare to find a development plan which excludes the historic route. The historic route is thus very much an integral part of tourism development in Ethiopia by its provision of the lion share of tourism receipts, international representation, and expansion of domestic tourism. This study was based on an extensive literature review including various books, articles and state documents which were reviewed to identify the major tourism resources of the area, the share of historic route in the tourism development plans of the country and its contribution for the development of tourism in the country.

Keywords: Tourism development plan, tourism resource, history, heritage

Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest and most important industries in the world in terms of employment creation and generation of foreign revenue (UNDP, 2011). According to UNWTO (2015), International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) hit a record 1133 million worldwide in 2014, up from 1087 million in 2013. Likewise, international tourism receipts earned by destinations worldwide have grown to US\$ 1245 billion in 2014 up from US\$ 1197 billion in 2013 (UNWTO, 2015). The sector, which is estimated to represent 10% of global GDP and one out of every eleven jobs worldwide, is expected to continue expanding significantly to reach 1.8 billion international tourists in 2030 (UNWTO, 2015), International Trade Centre (ITC) and World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2015) . With US\$ 1.5 trillion in export earnings, international tourism accounts for 30% of the world's exports of services and 6% of overall exports of goods and services. As a worldwide export category, tourism ranked fourth in 2013, after fuels, chemicals, food, and ahead of automotive products (ITC and UNWTO, 2015). In addition, emerging and developing economies currently account for 45% of all international tourist arrivals, and this share is expected to reach 57% by 2030.

As one of the developing countries in Africa, Ethiopia and its tourism are becoming an important sector contributing a great deal towards the social, cultural, and economic development aspects of the country (MoCT, 2011). According to the MoCT report, Ethiopia has hosted a total of 478,890 foreign tourists during the first two quarters of the current budget year. Similarly, the country has also earned 1,792,964,160 US dollars from international tourists. This income surpasses the income registered at the same time last year by 404,842,160 US dollars (MoCT, 2016). The report also states that the country received 88 thousand tourists per month and the average length of stay is 16 days.

Generally speaking, tourism is becoming one of the important sectors in Ethiopia; contributing a great deal towards all the social, cultural, and economic development aspects of the country. Though its development is still unsatisfactory when considering the diverse tourism resources of the country (MoCT, 2011) that are undervalued. Since the first development plan was announced in 1965 and tourism was recognized as a sector for economic growth, tourism grew at an average rate of 12% until 1974. Though, it declines after the coming in to power of Derg (military junta) (MoCT, 2009, b). Ethiopia was one of the first African countries to establish a tourist industry and, in the 1960's Ethiopia's tourist sector was on a par with Kenya's. Ethiopia then had more to offer than Kenya and while both nations have coastlines, spectacular scenery and abundant wildlife, Ethiopia also had historic sites and an identity defined by its own history, culture and peoples, rather than by colonialism (World Bank, 2006).

Globally it is common to form a tourist triangle, golden triangles, or tourist route that mark the major tourist sites of the region or the country. The Golden Triangle of Jordan, The Golden Triangle of north India, historic route 66 in USA are some examples of such land marks (Alananzeh, Amyan, Alghaswyneh, Jawabreh (2015) see also Global travel solutions (n.d); and Historic Route 66 Association of Arizona, (n.d). In Ethiopia the term historic route was widely used starting from the 1960's. In this period there were many developments in the move to make tourism a major economic activity. The emergence of the Ethiopian tourism organization and different studies conducted to support such efforts were some of the developments. The various studies and development plans conducted in the 1960's used the term historic route commonly. This term is still widely used in the tourism plans and itineraries. Besides its common usage the area covered by the historic route was varying with different historical changes and tourism development plans. For example a number of UNESCO studies consider the area from Addis Ababa to Asmara as historic route and until the separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia the area was recognized as the historic route.

The Historic route is an area which includes places, sites, monuments, people, and culture which exhibit the past history, society, religion, and political environment. In Ethiopia the Historic Route is the area which covers most of the northern part of Ethiopia. This historical sites and monuments are mainly churches(*Aksum Tsion Mariam*, Rock Hewn churches of *Lalibela* and *Tigray*) , palaces and castles (*Fasiledes* castle, *Yohannes IV* palace), steles (*Aksum* stele), monasteries (Lake *Tana* monasteries, *Debre Damo*...), markets, battle fields (*Adwa*, *Mekdel*), intangible heritages like cultural and religious festivals (*Meskele*, *Timket*, *Ashenda*), wedding and funeral ceremonies, oral traditions and tales. This study is designed to review of different tourism development plans which focuses on how much the historic route influenced tourism plans in Ethiopia and shows how much the area is essential in Ethiopian tourism development.

Objectives of the study

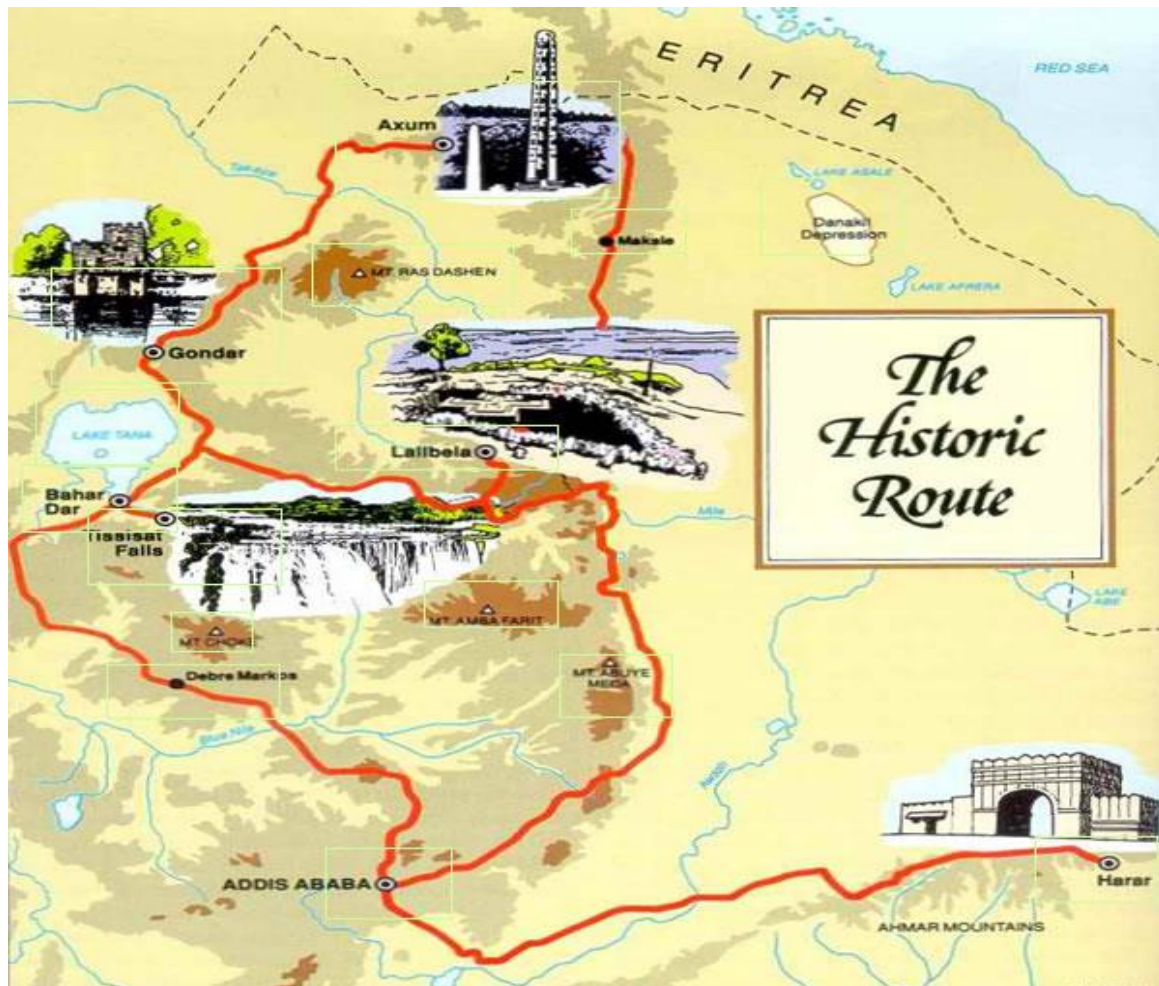
The general objective of the study was to examine the role of the historic route in Ethiopian tourism development.

Specific Objectives

- To assess the evolution of the historic route in tourism development plans of Ethiopia.
- To disclose the contribution of the historic route for the Ethiopian tourism development.

Geographic coverage of the historic route

The Historic route is an area which includes places, sites, monuments, people, and culture which exhibit the past history, society, religion, and political environment. In Ethiopia the historic route is the area which covers most of the northern part of Ethiopia. Traditionally the historic route includes places in the capital Addis Ababa, all the Amhara region and Axum from Tigray region. The main cities along the historic route are Addis Ababa, Bahir dar, Gondar, Lalibela and Axum. Today the concept of historic route is expanding from the northern part and forced to include the walled town of Harar from the east. A magazine published by ministry of culture and tourism, discover Ethiopia; consider the eastern walled town of Harar as one part of the historic route (MoCT, 2009a).



Source: Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2009, a)

Highlights of the Tourism Resources of the Historic Route

The historic circuit stretches over the entire breadth of northern Ethiopia and covers all the major historical sites and provides access to natural attractions like Simien Mountains and Danakil depression. The 'historic route' through northern Ethiopia forms the core of the country's tourist industry. Without exaggeration most of travelers to Ethiopia base the bulk of their

itinerary around this circuited route. There is nothing in Sub-Saharan Africa, and in a sense anything else in the world, that prepares the visitor for the wealth of historical and cultural treasure, both ancient and living, contained in Northern Ethiopia. The circuit pivots around four cities in the North and walled city of Harar in the east, all very different to others. The following section highlights the major tourism potentials/resources of this famous route. The discussion is a review from the following guidebooks (Phillips and Carillet, 2006; Amhara Culture, Tourism, and Park Development Bureau, 2011; North Gondar Zone Culture and Tourism Department, 2009)

I. Bahir Dar

It is mainly taken as the first stop in the Northern circuit.

The Blue Nile Falls: The Blue Nile Falls was one of the greatest falls in Africa before the construction of the electric power dam. It is located in Ethiopian plateau, passing the Blue Nile River. This waterfall is also known as Tis Issat meaning smoking water.

Lake Tana: Lake Tana is famous mostly as the source of the Blue Nile and as the largest lake of Ethiopia and one of the highest large lakes in the world. At the same time, Lake Tana is also renowned for its monasteries which can be found directly on its shores, on peninsulas and on the many islands scattered all over the lake.

Lake Tana monasteries: There are 37 islands that are scattered about the surface of Lake Tana, out of which some 20 shelter churches and monasteries of immense historical and cultural interest. Because of their isolation they were used to store art treasures and religious relics from all parts of the country. Kebran Gabriel: Ura Kidane Mehret, Daga Istifanos, Tana Cherkos, kebran Gebriel, Narga Selassie, Debre Mariyam, Azuwa mariam etc... are some of the monasteries.

II. Gondar

Founded by Emperor Fasilades in 1636, Gondar is a popular second stop on the northern circuit, which served as Ethiopia's capital for almost 300 years. The modern city of Gondar is popular as a tourist attraction for its many picturesque ruins in the Royal Enclosure, from which the Emperors once reigned.

The most famous buildings in the city lie in the Royal Enclosure, which include Fasilades castle, it is an old castle built in 17th century for the Ethiopian emperor Fasilides. The other palaces and structures are Iyasu's Palace, Dawit's Hall, a banqueting hall, stables, Mentewab's Castle, a chancellery, library, and three churches. The royal enclosure lye within a high stone walled fortification with an area of 70,000 m.sq, and 12 entrances.

Inside the city the other attraction is Fasilades' Bath. During the heyday of Gondar the bath had been used for sports and religious rites on the day of Epiphany. Presently it is home to an annual Timket ceremony where the water is blessed and then opened for bathing.

Qusquam complex built by Empress Mentewab, the eighteenth century Ras Mikael Sehul's Palace and the Debre Berhan Selassie Church; are the other magnificent tourist attractions in Gondar city.

To the North of Gondar, traditionally the preserve of hardened trekkers and hikers, lie the amazingly scenic Simien Mountain National Park, home to the country's main concentrations of

the endemic Gelada Baboon, Walia Ibex and Ethiopian wolves. The region includes many summits above 4,000 meters, and culminates in the highest point in Ethiopia, Ras Dashen, which at 4,543 meters is also Africa's fourth highest mountain.

III. Axum

A common third stop on the historic circuit is the ancient capital of Axum, which lies at the heart of the former Axumite Empire. Axum is best known today for the giant engraved obelisks (stele) that tower over the northeast of the town. The major Aksumite monuments in the town are stele; the largest number lie in the Northern Stele Park, ranging up to the 33-meter (33 meters high 3.84 meters wide 2.35 meters deep, weighing 520 tons) Great Stele, believed to have fallen and broken during construction. The tallest standing is the 24-meter (20.6 meters high 2.65 meters wide 1.18 meters deep, weighing 160 tons) King Ezana's Stele. Another stele (24.6 meters high 2.32 meters wide 1.36 meters deep, weighing 170 tons) removed by the Italian army was returned to Ethiopia in 2005 and reinstalled July 31, 2008. Axum's St. Mary of Zion church - believed to be repository of the Biblical Ark of the covenant- has for more than 1,600 years lain at the spiritual heart of the Ethiopian Orthodox church. St Mary of Zion church, built in 1665 and said to contain the Ark of the Covenant (a prominent twentieth-century church of the same name neighbors it), archaeological and ethnographic museums, the Ezana Stone written in Sabaean, Ge'ez and Ancient Greek in a similar manner to the Rosetta Stone, King Bazen's Tomb (a megalith considered to be one of the earliest structures) the so-called Queen of Sheba's Bath, the fourth-century Ta'akha Maryam and Dungur palaces, the monasteries of Abba Pentalewon and Abba Liqanos and the Lioness of Gobedra rock art.

IV. Lalibela

For most visitors to Ethiopia, the highlight of the northern circuit is the medieval capital of Lalibela, where high in the chilly mountains of Wollo stands a complex of a dozen rock-hewn churches often and justifiably ranked as the eighth wonder of the ancient world. The churches stand today as an inspirational and active shrine to a Christian civilization. The series of churches was built under the order of King Lalibela, who planned to transform the city of Lalibela into a New Jerusalem, as Muslims mainly occupied the old Jerusalem in Israel.

A series of monolithic churches were built around 12th and 13th century and until now, the Rock-Hewn Churches still stand firm to continually amaze tourists around the world. It was honored as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the year 1978. In total, there are eleven Rock-Hewn Churches constructed by king Lalibela and there are also other groups around the city: Bete Medhane Alem, where in the Lalibela Cross can be found, Bete Maryam- the church believed to be the oldest among the Rock-Hewn Churches, Bête Golgotha, Bête Mikael, Selassie Chapel, Bete meskel, Bete Danagel, Bete Amanuel, believed to be the royal chapel, Bete Merkorios, Bete Gabriel Rufael, Bete Abba Libanos, Bete Giyorgis, acclaimed to be the best well-preserved church among the series of churches, Monastery of Ashotan Maryam, Yimrehane Kristos church.

V. Harar

The other historical destination set apart to the east of the country is Harar, well known for its Islamic learning and scholarship, as well as its handicraft, including weaving basket-making, and book-binding. Places of interest inside the walled city of Harar include the impressive centuries-old walls themselves, which had five gates until 1889, when Emperor Menelik II built two more. Also of interest are Ras Makonnen's (father of the last king of Ethiopia) stately old

palace and the Jami mosque, which dates back to the 17th century among the other 89 mosques. Nearby the mosque is a house believed to be a residence for the famous French poet Arthur Rimbaud. Also the colorful Christian and Muslim markets are places of interest to spend time.

VI. Other Attractions along the historic route

Debre libanos
Blue Nile gorge
Gorgora
Debre Damo
Yeha
Adigrat
Mekele
Adwa
Rock hewn churches of Tigray
Negash mosque
Alamata road
Woldia
Dessie
Kombolcha
Hayk
Debre Berhan
Ankober

Major findings

This section is organized in to two parts; the first section elaborates on the Ethiopian tourism development plans and the attention given for historic route development. The second section illustrates the contribution of the Historic Route for the development of tourism in Ethiopia.

1. Ethiopian Tourism Development Plans and Historic Route

Tourism as an economic sector comes in to being in Ethiopia very recently, compared to other countries in the world. Specifically the government started to pay attention during the second half of the twentieth century. Even though there were some efforts by emperor Menelik II by establishing the first hotel in 1909, tourism as an economic sector provoked the attention of the imperial government during the 1960's. In the 1960's the government has taken a lot of positive reactions to make tourism one potential for the country's economy, the first positive reaction of the imperial government was establishment of the Ethiopian tourism organization (ETO). The second reinforcing move was the invitation of different international organizations and consultants to advise Ethiopian tourism organization on tourism development issues, inventory of monuments, sites, cultural and archaeological artifacts, identifying tourism priority areas and developing short term and long term tourism development plans. Tourism was considered a key economic growth sector in Ethiopia as early as 1966 when the first Tourism Development Master Plan was developed. Guided by the plan, the government invested heavily in tourism infrastructure in the subsequent decade – including establishing Ethiopian Airlines for international and domestic air access, building airfields around the country at key tourism sites, building hotels at or near these sites, and establishing a national tourism operation to take tourists to the hotels and attractions. The main attraction was the "Historic Route" which at the

time (1968-73) Ethiopian Airlines was servicing with seven flights per day (up to 280 passengers daily). The “Historic Route” took in Addis, Lalibela, Gondar, Axum and Asmara) (World Bank, 2006).

The establishment of the Ethiopian Tourism Organization and the Tourism Development Plan and other activities conducted by different international organizations and consultants were the two main reasons which played a great role for the emergence of the concept historic route. In the late 1960’s there were different studies conducted concerning Ethiopia’s tourism potential and development plans. These studies were mainly conducted through various UNESCO missions and international consultants hired by the government of Ethiopia. The UNESCO consultants, Angelini and Mougin (1968) were among the pioneers in preparing tourism development plan. Their main tasks were to prepare a census and an estimate of the costs involved in the restoration of monuments and sites of the Historic Route, with recommendations on methods of designing to preserve the scientific, historical and aesthetic value of the area covered by the work of restoration (IBRD, 1971). The other organizations which participate in developing tourism development plan include the Arthur D Little company and the IANUS teams.

In the next section we will see the concern given for the Historic Route and the implication of those studies towards this main tourism priority area of the country.

A. UNESCO MISSIONS

Since 1968 UNESCO has assisted the government by sending a number of missions to Ethiopia. The main task of the early missions was to prepare a census and an estimate the cost involved in the restoration of the monuments and sites of the historic route with recommendations on methods designed to preserve the historic and aesthetic value of the area covered by the work of restoration. Besides restoration the UNESCO team tourism investment opportunities on the historic route and also analyzed the cost of investment needed especially on the opening of new tourist accommodations (IBRD, 1971). The Ministry of Development and Planning deems that the UNESCO mission should, and this was forcefully stressed, be oriented toward the preparation of draft request for financial assistance for developing cultural tourism (Angelini & Mougin, 1968).

The “Historic Route” name was given to the road which, via Bahir dar and Gondar, joins Addis Ababa to the ancient capital, Axum. The Ministry of Development and Planning considers this project as having highest priority. It was the Ministry’s request that the present UNESCO mission took place to study some of the important problems connected with its development. The “Historic Route” is exceptionally interesting because of its monuments and historic recollections, the beauty of the natural site and the religious communities in the cities and towns through or near which it passes (Angelini & Mougin, 1968).

In 1968 the first UNESCO mission visited the country to carry out a census of the monuments on the historic route. In 1968 a team of experts, who were nominated by the international bank of reconstruction and development (IBRD), recommended to the imperial Ethiopian government the preservation and development of the sites and monuments on the historic route for the growth of tourism. Several studies were carried out following these recommendations which forced the government to adopt various administrative and legislative measures including the budgeting of funds for the development of tourism in Ethiopia.

In 1971, the government requested UNESCO to advice on three areas: (IBRD, 1971)

1. The establishment of an inventory of the cultural heritages mainly art objects.
2. Priority for restoration of endangered monuments
3. The work plan for the restoration of endangered monuments and cost estimation.

By having these areas of interest in mind a mission was conducted in June 1971 to fulfill the above mentioned objectives. The first objective of the mission was the establishment of an inventory of the cultural heritages. Concerning the Historic Route as the main attraction of the country, the inventory initially concentrated on the main centers Axum, Lalibela, Gondar and Lake Tana. The inventory was thus limited to the towns and neighboring villages, monasteries and churches which can be reached in not more than one day's journey by motor vehicle.

The second objective concerned the priority areas for restoration of endangered monuments. The mission selected the northern Historic Route as a priority area for restoration of monuments. The report prepared by this mission the Historic Route and it addresses all the historic sites of the route, the report included working plan of the historic route and description of the main tourism potentials exist in the historic towns of Axum, Lalibela, Gondar and Lake Tana area.

The third objective was work plan for the restoration of monuments and the cost estimates. The restoration program in these four tourism centers may be summarized by saying that the team gave its recommendations on the following issues: the preservation and maintenance of cultural heritages, the basic infrastructure and the possible ways of promoting historic route.

B. IANUS (Ethiopian tourism development plan)

The IANUS team conducted its field work in October, November and December 1965. The team mentioned the difficulty of trying to develop the whole region at the same time as other major tourism destinations and the project was developed by selecting specific areas which they called "poles of tourist development". In this project there were six poles of tourist development (IANUS, 1969).

1. Addis Ababa and weekend areas (within 250 kilometers of Addis Ababa)
2. Lake Tana area
3. Massawa and Dahlak Island area
4. The Assab area
5. Harar area
6. Arba Minch area

Out of these six poles of tourist development most of the areas are an integral part of northern Ethiopia. Especially the lake Tana area including Bahir dar, Gondar and the areas around lake Tana area are considered key areas of the Historic Route.

Besides the poles of tourist development the IANUS mission identified eight types of tourist itinerary which should be implemented to HELP make tourism a major economic activity. The itineraries are the following. The Historic Route, The eastern route, The Kombolcha-Assabe route, The Harar route, Southern Ethiopia route, Addis Ababa Jimma route, Addis Ababa - Lekemti route and The tourist air itinerary (IANUS, 1969).

We can see that in these itineraries the Historic Route itinerary has been given priority. This itinerary includes the following segments in the historic route from Addis Ababa to the blue Nile gorge, from Blue Nile gorge to Bahir dar, from Bahir dar to Gondar, from Gondar to Adi Abun, from Adi Abun to Adigrat, from Adigrat to Dessie and finally from Dessie to Addis Ababa.

The IANUS team describes the northern part of Ethiopia historic route because the route from Addis Ababa to Bahir dar, Gondar, Axum, Debre Damo, Lalibela and Dessie crosses Ethiopia's main historical and archaeological places. Starting from Addis Ababa; the historic route winds through central and northern Ethiopia. It crosses Shoa, Gojjam, Begemeder, Tigre and Wollo on highways covering a total of 2136 km (IANUS, 1969).

C. Arthur D. Little (a plan for developing tourism in Ethiopia)

In this section we examine the concern and priority given for the Historic Route in developing tourism in Ethiopia. Arthur Little participated in this planning activity based on the invitation offered by the technical agency of the Ministry of Planning and Development of the Ethiopian government. After a series of discussions and meetings the Arthur D. Little company accepted an invitation to conduct the plan as required. The report of this study was prepared in two volumes.

Arthur D. Little's attention was concentrated on the following locations Addis Ababa, Bahir dar, Gondar, Simien Mountains, Lalibela, Axum, Asmara, and the Rift Valley. The plan presented the Historic Route as the best opportunity to develop tourism in Ethiopia. The team also concluded that Ethiopia's prime attraction was the Historic Route stretching between Addis Ababa and Asmara. The attractions of Bahir dar, Gondar, Lalibela and Axum are recognized in the market place which sees Ethiopia's major appeal as being its ancient culture, its art, its colorful history and its friendly people. The Arthur D. Little team also considered the Historic Route to have the additional advantage of being on the main round trip air route and of having international airports at each end of the route i.e. Addis Ababa and Asmara (Little, 1970).

The main conclusion of Arthur D. Little survey is that the country's resources should be focused on developing the historic route and providing it with the facilities required by its prime market. Lalibela, Axum, Gondar and Bahir dar were the main points of the route from Addis Ababa to Asmara which also included other churches and monasteries along it and near it.

The Arthur D. Little team also prepared five years tourism development program (Arthur D. Little, 1970). The planned tourism development strategy has short term and long term strategy. In its short term strategy the team recommended the historic route to be considered as Ethiopia's short term priority tourism development area considering Ethiopia's art, culture, and history can best be enjoyed on a tour of the historic route. In the long term the team proposed providing new offshoots of the historic route as well as the possibilities of an easy access to other attractions along it and to the other parts of the country. The Arthur D. Little team also recommended some immediate measures to improve the attractions and build up their tourism potential of the following areas for which most are historic route sites. Addis Ababa, Rift valley-week end area, Bahir dar, Gondar, The Simien Mountains, Lalibela, Axum, Northern historic circuit.

The Arthur D. Little team also recommended the following public tourism infrastructure development (1970-75) (Arthur D. Little, 1970).

- I. Bahir Dar:- Lake tana lodge (ex Ras hotel), Upgrading of the airport, Road to blue Nile falls, Launch jetties areas visited
- II. Gondar:- Castle hotel, Upgrading the airport, Castle hotel water supply, Access roads to castle hotel and to Kusquam, In town tourist rest facilities, Museum and handicraft centers, Castle hotel telephone line
- III. Simien mountains:- High Simien mountain lodge and camps, Air strip for light air craft, Lodge water, electric supply and telephone line, Access road from Debarq to lodge site
- IV. Lalibela:- Lalibela lodge, Upgrading airport, Lodge water, electricity and telephone line link, Woldia- Lalibela road, Access road to churches, Tourism center (museum, shops, rest facilities) Axum:- Sheba hotel, Upgrading airport, Sheba hotel water, electricity and telephone supply, Access road to Sheba hotel, Landscaping around stele and St. Mary of Sion, Museum and antiquarium.

D. Regional tourism development plan for North East West Ethiopia

This plan is one of the most recently conducted plans (1995) and it recommended to offers six holidays, and the Historic Route holiday is the first mentioned offer. It also forecasted tourist arrival of the six holidays and concluded that the historic route will attract more tourists than the other six holidays (Tourconsultant, 1995). Generally the above mentioned tourism development plans are mainly focused on the Historic Route and each of them give priority for the development of historical sites and monuments along the route and provision of tourism and other public infrastructures mainly accommodation establishments. On the other hand the government was also interested to make the route a major tourist destination through financial and legal measures.

E. Federal democratic republic of Ethiopia tourism development policy

The first ever tourism development policy of Ethiopia was issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The Ministry was established under the proclamation number 471/2005. The tourism development policy was corrected and adopted by the Council of Ministers at its 92nd Regular Session held on August 7, 2009.

In terms of content the policy has been structured under five sections:

- I. Review of the prevailing situation of the tourism industry
- II. The need for an Ethiopian tourism development policy
- III. Main policy issues and strategies
- IV. Roles and responsibilities of those taking part in implementing the policy
- V. Sources of finance for the implementation of the policy.

The tourism policy is different from the other development plans in its holistic approach to all types of attraction like historical, cultural and natural attractions. There is not any separate concern given for the Historic Route, rather, the policy expresses concerns for the whole country as such and various resource bases.

F. Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) 2010/11-2014/15

Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) is a medium term strategic framework for the five-year period (2010/11-2014/15). This plan is directed towards achieving Ethiopia's long term vision and sustaining the rapid and broad based economic growth (MoFED, 2010). In this five year plan tourism is one of the industries which was planned to support the countries long term development. The plan expects the tourism sector to achieve the following objective.

“Protecting and promoting Ethiopian cultural diversity and promoting the culture of the different nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia and developing these in harmony with modern education, to enable the country to be competent in the international tourism market and particularly making Ethiopia one of the most selected destinations of Africa and to create a conducive environment, whereby the country's wildlife and their habitats are protected and developed in a sustainable manner” (MoFED, 2010).

This plan is not specified for the tourism sector, so that it only shows the general objectives and implementation strategies. Because of this there is no specific emphasis given for the Historic Route, rather it shows a comprehensive approach towards developing the entire tourism sector in Ethiopia.

The contribution of the historic route for the Ethiopian tourism

As the country's main attraction site; the Historic Route contributes a lot towards the countries tourism sector. Some of the contributions are provide a unique quality for the countries tourist attractions, by playing an iconic representation role for Ethiopia's tourist attractions and for the country as a whole, both locally and internationally, and by being the largest shareholder of the countries tourism receipts and a sought after domestic tourism destination. The next section examines each contribution and presents some facts as to how influential the Historic Route is in Ethiopian tourism.

1. Providing uniqueness in the competitive tourism Market

In tourism, uniqueness plays a great role on the potential of destinations to attract visitors and it is also the basic characteristic of visitor attractions. Uniqueness is the edge that sets an attraction in a given destination apart from the competition somewhere else. Many of African countries are known for their natural attractions like national parks, sanctuaries and mountainous areas. Even though Ethiopia has many natural attractions, the country is not benefiting from the sites; the competition in the natural segment of the market is high from the neighboring and other African countries. Nature based tourism is well developed and promoted in the other countries tourism markets and more so than the Ethiopian, i.e. Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa. So it is a must to have other competitive advantages to benefit from the tourism sector. The Historic Route with its unique historical monuments in the sub-Saharan Africa provides Ethiopia a unique feature and makes the country an exceptional destination for cultural tourists. The Ethiopian tourism can also benefit from these unique features by providing the proper service for the cultural segment of the sector.

2. Cultural icon representation

A cultural icon can be a symbol, logo, picture, name, face, person, building or other image that is readily recognized and generally represents an object or concept with great cultural

significance to a wide cultural group (<http://everything2.com/title/cultural+icon>). Cultural icons may be national, regional or related to a city. And they can be symbols for a nation, or can evoke particular values held by that state.

The historical monuments and sites of the Historic Route are representative figures of the country internationally. Ethiopian tourism organizations and other sectors use the monuments of the historic route as a privilege to indicate the countries ancient history, art, culture and civilization. The sites of the historic route are famous among the tourist community and represent the country. If anyone checks a website about Ethiopia he/she definitely see images of Lalibela, Gondar, and Aksum. This representativeness also plays a great role to create a positive image. If you take the Axum stele, Rock Hewn churches of Lalibela, Blue Nile falls and Fasile castle you can find their picture in folders, brochures, and web sites of travel agents and other tourism organizations representing the countries tourist attractions.

3. Large share of the country's tourism receipt

The Historic Route produces the bulk of tourism receipt of the country. The site is a must to visit itinerary in Ethiopia and most of the tourists who came to Ethiopia visit the historic route. The "Historic Route" home of age-old monuments and other heritages has the Lion's Share of the country's tourist arrivals and receipt. Even though there is no report which show the exact share of regions to the tourism receipt and arrival of the country it is clear that most of the tourist itinerary covers the Historic Route and income generation from that area is larger than the other parts. For example the Amhara regional state, which is the area that cover most of the historic route, received 1,326,431 domestic tourists and 128,690 international visitors during 2010/11 budget year. In terms of income 315,023,306 Ethiopian birr was generated in the same year (Amhara National Regional State Culture Tourism and Parks Development Bureau, 2012).

4. Large number of world heritage sites

UNESCO has registered eleven Ethiopian historical and natural sites as world heritage sites. These are Fasil castle (1979), Axum(1980), rock hewn churches of Lalibela(1978), Simien mountains national park (1978), Tiya (1980), Harar (2006), lower Omo valley(1980), lower Awash valley(1980), Konso (2011), Meskel celebration (2013), and Chenbelala celebration (2015).

Among these eleven world heritage sites, five are on the Historic Route (Fasil Castle, Lalibela, Axum, Simien Mountains' National Park and Harar). This share enabled the Historic Route to take the lion's share in representing the country on the world heritage site list. On the other hand, the recently listed world heritage site, the Meskele festival, is also extensively celebrated along the Historic Route. The Historic Route also possess the advantage of having the only natural world heritage site of the country, the Simien Mountains National Park.

The registration of these sites on the UNESCO world heritage sites list enables the tourism sector to attract more tourists and it also plays a great role to build up the image of the country by reflecting the countries ancient history, civilization, and unique culture.

5. Expansion of domestic tourism

The Historic Route has a great potential for the expansion of domestic tourism in Ethiopia. Even these days there are a lot of domestic tourists along this route, as a fact any one can look 1,326,431 domestic tourists who visit Amhara region during 2010/11 budget year. We can

assume how much the number will increase if we have clear data from Tigray, Addis Ababa, and Harari Regions. There are different reasons why the historic route is the main destination for domestic tourism and how it could support the expansion of domestic tourism in Ethiopia.

The first reason is that the reputation of the Historic Route is based on having annual festivals such as the Timket festival in Gondar, Ethiopian Christmas at Lalibela, and St. Mary celebration in Axum are the major activities which are held annually. These festivals are widely known in the country and attended by many domestic tourists from different parts of the country. So the Historic Route can play a big role by initiating domestic tourism activities through the above mentioned festivals and other religious and cultural festivals. The second reason is that most Ethiopians wish to visit sites of the Historic Route once in their life and many citizens of the country are interested to see these historic towns. So these interests and wishes create a big opportunity for the development and expansion of domestic tourism. The main focus should be giving the people a cheap holiday packages to experience historical monuments and sites of the area.

Conclusion

Ethiopia as a country with one of the richest histories on the African continent with a diverse natural scenery, culture, people, endemic fauna and flora and being home of many international and regional organizations can offer a lot for tourists. Among all the tourism attractions and potentials the Historic Route which mainly refers to most of the northern part of Ethiopia has a huge potential role to play in developing tourism in Ethiopia. Since 1960's the main focus of tourism development plans was developing sites of the historic route into major tourism destinations through conservation and preservation, major infrastructure developments and promotion activities. The Historic Route encompasses sites along a circular trip starting from Addis Ababa via the main road to Bahir dar, Gondar, Axum, Mekele, Lalibela, Dessie and finally ending in Addis Ababa. In recent publications and tour itineraries, the representation of the term Historic Route is extended to include the walled town of Harar from the eastern part. The sites along the Historic Route reflect the country's ancient political and social history, religious beliefs, architectural style, festivals and people. The Historic Route is not the only site of Ethiopia's ancient history, monument, art, and people but is also a major tourist destination. The route contributes hugely to the development of the tourism sector and this can be even bigger in the near future. The contribution of the route reflected in terms of share of tourism receipts, international representation, expansion of domestic tourism, and the like, cannot be undervalued.

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